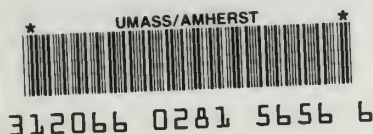


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Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Violent Crime and Weapon Use in Massachusetts

A Report Prepared for the Massachusetts Legislature

Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety
Programs Division

Statistical Analysis Center

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Statistical Analysis Center.

November 2000

Authors:

Diana Brensilber, Statistical Analysis Center Director
Kathleen Krasco, Statistical Analysis Center Deputy Director
Sara Phillips, Research Analyst
Patricia Bergin, Research Analyst

If you refer to this report in a publication or in any other manner, we would appreciate being informed about such a reference. Whenever possible, a copy of such a document or reference should be sent to the Statistical Analysis Center at the address below.

If you have any questions or feedback regarding this report or the survey, please contact:

Diana Brensilber, SAC Director
Massachusetts Statistical Analysis Center
Executive Office of Public Safety
Programs Division
1 Ashburton Place, Room 2110
Boston, MA 02108
Telephone: (617) 727-6300
E-Mail: Diana.Brensilber@state.ma.us
Internet address: <http://www.state.ma.us/ccj>

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Methodology

Data presented in this report were compiled from various sources. A review of the multiple data sources and how they are presented is necessary to ensure proper understanding of the information provided.

Police agencies in Massachusetts voluntarily report aggregate crime statistics to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Report Program via the Massachusetts State Police Crime Reporting Unit (CRU). The CRU records, analyzes, and forwards these data to the FBI. While the FBI's annual publication "Crime in the United States," details the nation's crime statistics, the CRU dataset contains certain information not released by the FBI. As such, data from both sources are presented in this report.

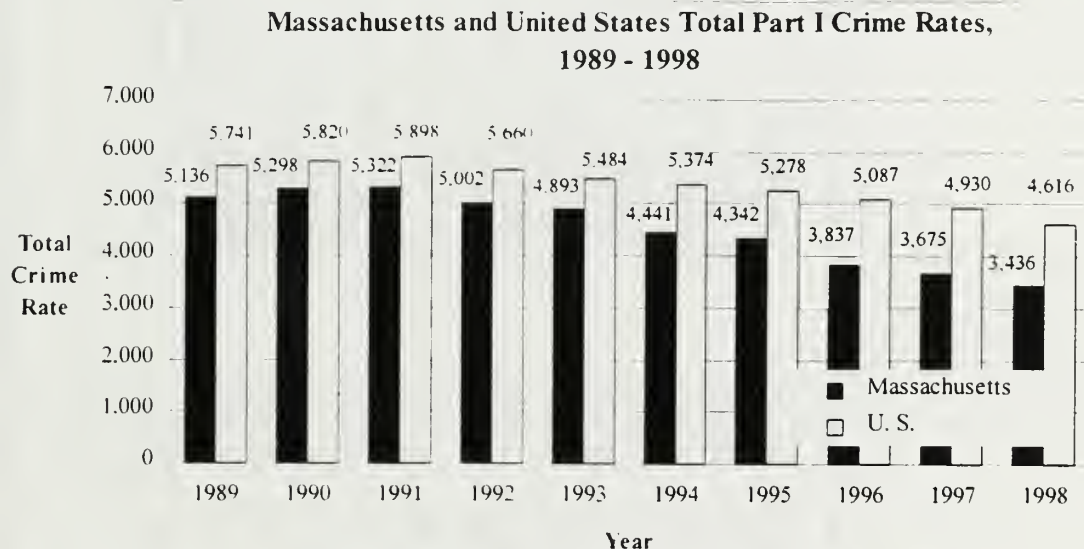
Unless cited otherwise, the data presented in this report was compiled using the FBI's "Crime in the United States" publications. County-level data and certain data concerning use of weapons was provided by the CRU.

Crime Index Total

The offenses included in the crime index are the violent crimes of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft

Following a peak in 1991, for the seventh consecutive year, Massachusetts has witnessed a steady decline in both the total number of crimes reported and the overall crime rate. This is consistent with a similar declining trend in the crime rate nationally. In 1998, Massachusetts' total crime rate decreased 6.5% over the previous year, consistent with the United States' total crime rate decline of 6.4% in 1998 over the year prior. Since 1991, the total crime rate for Massachusetts has dropped 35%, compared to the U.S. total crime rate decline of 22% during the same time (Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Total Crime in Massachusetts Counties

From 1997 to 1998, decreases in total crime were experienced in communities residing in 11 Massachusetts counties (Table 1). Hampden County experienced the greatest decline (11%) in total crime over the two-year period. Much greater declines in total reported crime were witnessed between 1994 and 1998. Three counties in Massachusetts (Suffolk, Middlesex, and Essex) experienced declines greater than 25% over the five-year period. Conversely, Nantucket and Franklin Counties reported increases in total crime over the same time period (56% and 15% respectively).

Table 1. Total Crime Volume Reported by Communities, by County

1997 vs. 1998					
County	# of Communities Reporting	1997	1998	# Chg. 97/98	% Chg. 97/98
Barnstable	15	7,449	7,506	57	0.8%
Berkshire	9	2,965	2,939	-26	-0.9%
Bristol	20	19,752	18,485	-1,267	-6.4%
Dukes	3	482	499	17	3.5%
Essex	29	23,681	24,324	643	2.7%
Franklin	12	2,568	2,520	-48	-1.9%
Hampden	14	28,965	25,759	-3,206	-11.1%
Hampshire	10	2,646	2,441	-205	-7.7%
Middlesex	48	33,807	31,202	-2,605	-7.7%
Nantucket	1	608	604	-4	-0.7%
Norfolk	26	12,222	11,510	-712	-5.8%
Plymouth	22	13,248	12,305	-943	-7.1%
Suffolk	4	42,142	38,727	-3,415	-8.1%
Worcester	50	24,370	23,222	-1,148	-4.7%

1994 vs. 1998					
County	# of Communities Reporting	1994	1998	# Chg. 94/98	% Chg. 94/98
Barnstable	14	7,015	6,272	-743	-10.6%
Berkshire	8	2,840	2,897	57	2.0%
Bristol	16	17,995	15,598	-2,396	-13.3%
Dukes	2	542	484	-58	-10.7%
Essex	26	31,949	23,454	-8,495	-26.6%
Franklin	6	1,988	2,278	290	14.6%
Hampden	10	19,038	18,664	-374	-2.0%
Hampshire	6	1,633	1,747	114	7.0%
Middlesex	43	42,588	29,170	-13,418	-31.5%
Nantucket	1	387	604	217	56.1%
Norfolk	25	13,463	11,370	-2,093	-15.5%
Plymouth	17	12,270	10,395	-1,875	-15.3%
Suffolk	1	53,078	34,981	-18,097	-34.1%
Worcester	44	24,794	22,516	-2,278	-9.2%

Source: Massachusetts Crime Reporting Unit

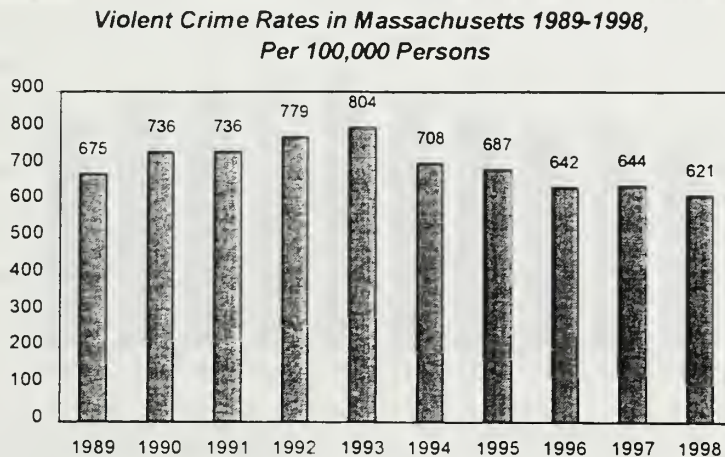
Note: Data analysis was limited to communities that reported both years of data (i.e., 1997 and 1998 or 1994 and 1998). The number of communities reporting tends to be higher in the 1997 vs. 1998 analysis due to an increase in the number of communities reporting data

Violent Crime

Violent crimes include murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault which are reported to police. Violent crimes involve some use of force or the threat of force.

In 1998, 211,203 Part I crimes were reported in Massachusetts, of which 38,192 (18.1%) were violent crimes. The 1998 violent crime rate of 621 per 100,000 population fell 3.6% from the 1997 rate, representing the lowest level of violent crime since 1988.

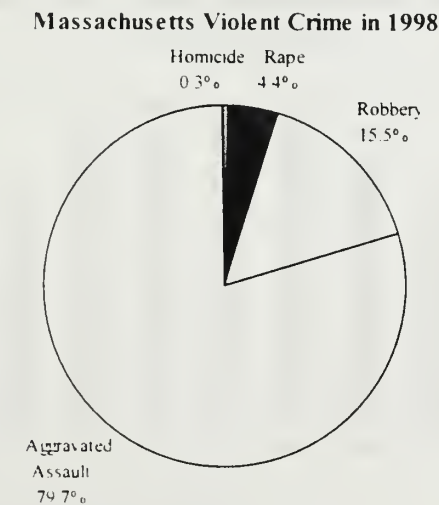
Figure 2.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Nearly 80% of all violent crimes in 1998 were aggravated assaults. Robberies accounted for an additional 15.5%. Forcible rape accounted for 4.4%, while homicides accounted for .3% of the violent crime total.

Figure 3.

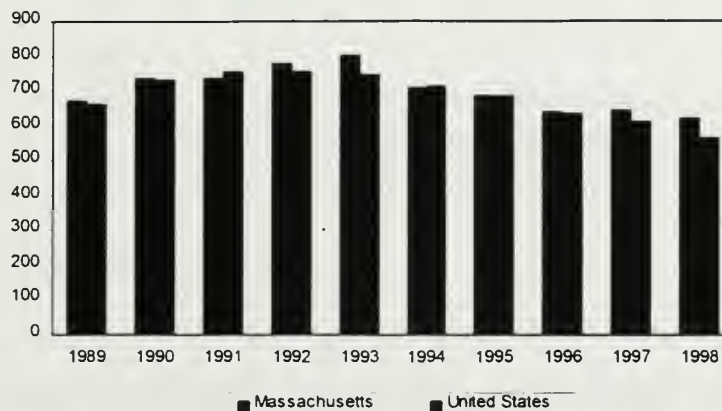


Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Over the past decade, the total Massachusetts violent crime rate has been generally higher than the national average. Though homicide, rape, and robbery rates have continued to be lower than the national rates, the aggravated assault rate has been substantially higher, therefore impacting the total violent crime rate and consequently surpassing the national rate. Figure 4 compares the U.S. and Massachusetts violent crime rates for the years 1989 through 1998.

Figure 4.

Massachusetts and United States Violent Crime Rates 1989-1998, Per 100,000 Persons



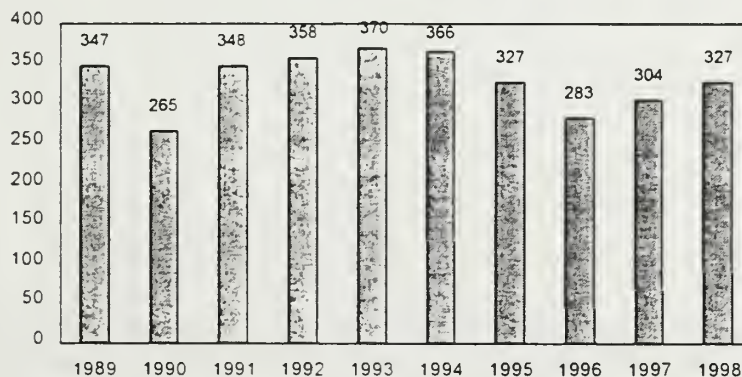
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Law Enforcement Response

Nearly 16,000 people were arrested for violent crimes in Massachusetts in 1998. Violent crime arrests accounted for almost half (48%) of all Index crime arrests made during the year. From 1997 to 1998, the arrest rate for violent crimes increased by 7.6%.

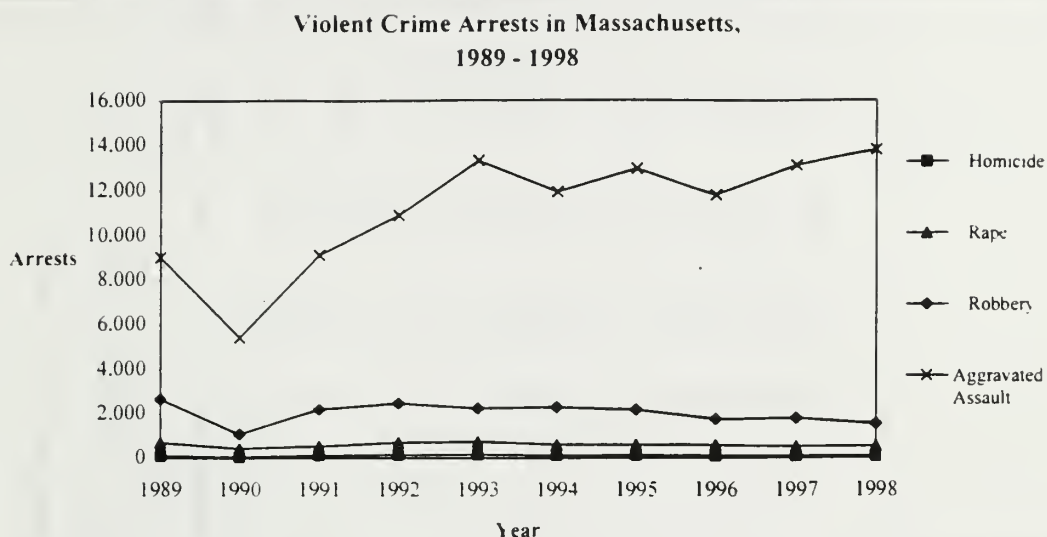
Figure 5.

Violent Crime Arrests in Massachusetts 1989-1998, Per 100,000 Persons



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Figure 6.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Weapon Use

From 1997 to 1998, Massachusetts experienced a 6.5% decrease in the number of violent crimes committed with a firearm.¹ Data indicate that 2,472 of the 32,213 violent crimes reported in 1998 were committed with a firearm. Collectively, these figures represent 7.7% of violent crimes and 1.4% of index crimes committed in the Commonwealth during that year. It should be noted that of the 2,472 of those violent crimes where a firearm was used in 1998, 836 (33.8%) were cleared.²

¹ According to the Crime Reporting Unit of the Massachusetts State Police, violent crimes include homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Violent crimes committed with a firearm include only the violent crimes of robbery and aggravated assault.

² The FBI defines "cleared" offenses (exceptional or otherwise) as those where at least one person is arrested, charged with the commission of an offense, and turned over to the court for prosecution. "Exceptionally" cleared refers to cases where the clearance occurred outside the control of the law enforcement agency, e.g., perpetrator's death or victim's refusal to cooperate with the perpetrator's prosecution.

Violent Crime in Massachusetts Counties

Between 1997 and 1998, violent crime declines were experienced in 7 Massachusetts counties, with Middlesex County showing greatest decline (12%) in violent crime over the two-year period. Middlesex and Norfolk Counties experienced the most significant decline (42% and 35% respectively) in violent crime from 1994 to 1998.

Table 2. Violent Crime Volume Reported by Communities, by County

County	1997 vs. 1998				
	# of Communities Reporting	1997	1998	# Chg. 97/98	% Chg. 97/98
Barnstable	15	1,228	1,282	54	4.4%
Berkshire	9	359	338	-21	-5.8%
Bristol	20	3,336	3,349	13	0.4%
Dukes	3	43	42	-1	-2.3%
Essex	29	3,809	3,878	69	1.8%
Franklin	12	726	850	124	17.1%
Hampden	14	7,787	7,102	-685	-8.8%
Hampshire	10	305	381	76	24.9%
Middlesex	48	4,581	4,027	-554	-12.1%
Nantucket	1	24	45	21	87.5%
Norfolk	26	898	909	11	1.2%
Plymouth	22	2,159	2,053	-106	-4.9%
Suffolk	4	8,803	8,245	-558	-6.3%
Worcester	50	4,824	4,781	-43	-0.9%

Source: Massachusetts Crime Reporting Unit

Note: Data analysis was limited to communities that reported both years of data (i.e., 1997 and 1998 or 1994 and 1998). The number of communities reporting data analysis due to an increase in the number of communities reporting data

County	1994 vs. 1998				
	# of Communities Reporting	1994	1998	# Chg. 94/98	% Chg. 94/98
Barnstable	14	1,200	1,156	-44	-3.7%
Berkshire	8	337	332	-5	-1.5%
Bristol	16	3,177	2,902	-275	-8.7%
Dukes	2	41	42	1	2.4%
Essex	26	3,732	3,530	-202	-5.4%
Franklin	6	553	819	266	48.1%
Hampden	10	3,404	5,309	1,906	56.0%
Hampshire	6	232	272	40	17.2%
Middlesex	43	6,523	3,801	-2,722	-41.7%
Nantucket	1	25	45	20	80.0%
Norfolk	25	1,388	902	-486	-35.0%
Plymouth	17	1,817	1,669	-148	-8.1%
Suffolk	1	10,664	7,427	-3,237	-30.4%
Worcester	44	4,160	4,645	485	11.7%

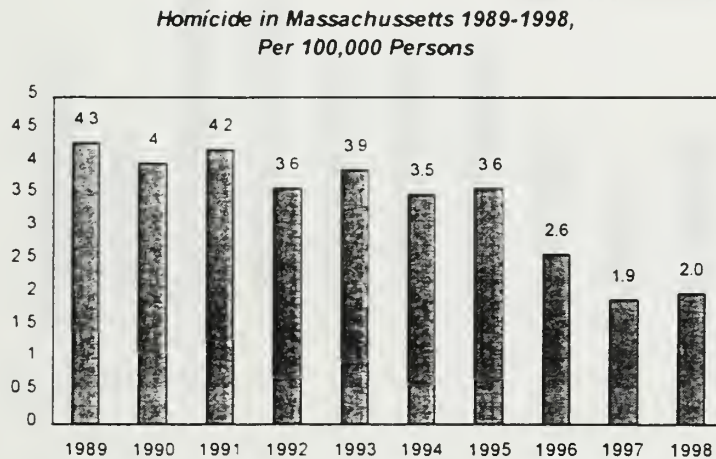
The number of communities reporting tends to be higher in the 1997 vs 1998

Homicide

The willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another

The FBI estimates 124 persons were murdered in Massachusetts in 1998.³ The 1998 murder rate for the Commonwealth was reported at two victims per 100,000 inhabitants. This figure represents a 4.2% increase in comparison to the estimated murder rate in 1997. Overall, homicide constitutes .06% of all index crimes.

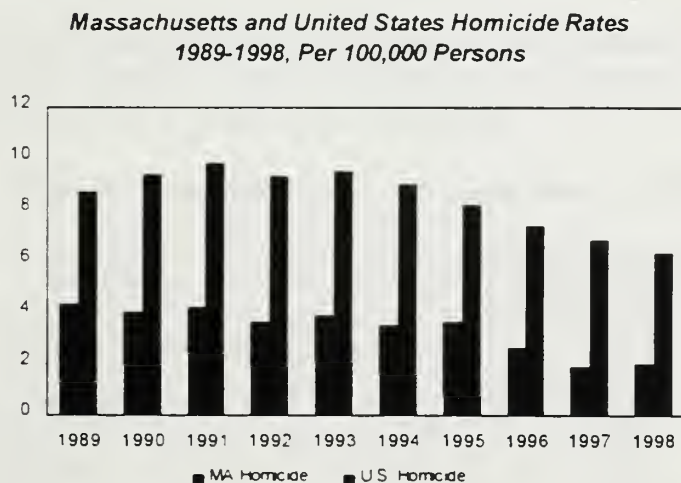
Figure 7.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Over the past decade, the total Massachusetts homicide crime rate has been significantly lower than the national rate.

Figure 8.



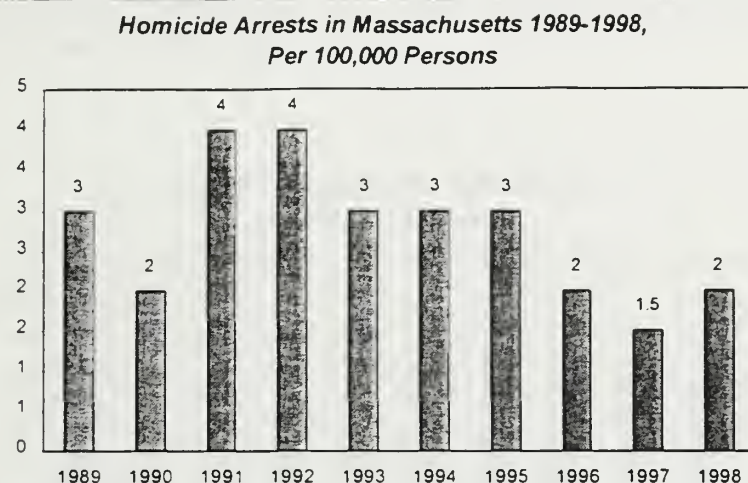
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

³ The Massachusetts State Police Crime Reporting Unit disputes the 1998 FBI homicide data because of local reporting discrepancies. The FBI reports that Massachusetts' homicide rate has increased 5.3% in 1998 (119 to 124), whereas the Crime Reporting Unit reports a 5.6% decline (123 to 116).

Law Enforcement Response

In 1998, 84 persons were reported arrested for murder by law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth. Massachusetts' arrest rate for murder increased 12.5% over the 1997 rate.

Figure 9.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Weapons Used

The Massachusetts Crime Reporting Unit reports that of the 116 reported homicides for 1998, just over half (54.3%) were committed with a firearm. However, though the number of homicides declined in 1998 from 1997, homicides committed with a firearm increased by 5%. According to the FBI, a handgun was the firearm of choice in 83% of homicides committed using a firearm. A knife or cutting instrument was employed in twenty-three percent of Massachusetts homicides in 1998.

According to the Massachusetts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, in 1996, stab wounds from a knife or other sharp objects represented the second most common cause of homicide deaths, an increase of 14% over the prior year (Table 3).

Table 3. Homicide Deaths in Massachusetts, 1995 – 1996

Cause of Death	1995	1996	Percent of Total Homicides, 1996	Percent Change 1995 - 1996
Gun Shot Wound	114	91	47.9%	-20.2%
Stab Wound	50	57	30.0%	14.0%
Blunt Trauma	23	25	13.2%	8.7%
Asphyxia	6	6	3.2%	0.0%
Strangulation	-	6	3.2%	-
Other	27	5	2.6%	-81.5%
TOTAL	220	190	100.1%	-13.6%

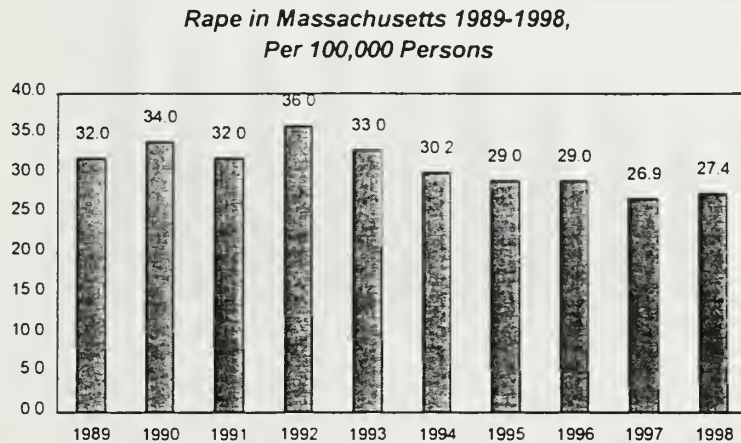
Source: Massachusetts Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 1997

Rape

The carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.

In 1998, Massachusetts law enforcement agencies received reports of 1,687 forcible rapes, representing a 2.4% increase from the 1997 figure. However, the crime of rape reflects less than 1% of all Part I crimes reported in the state. Since a peak in 1992, the number of reported rapes in Massachusetts has declined 22%.

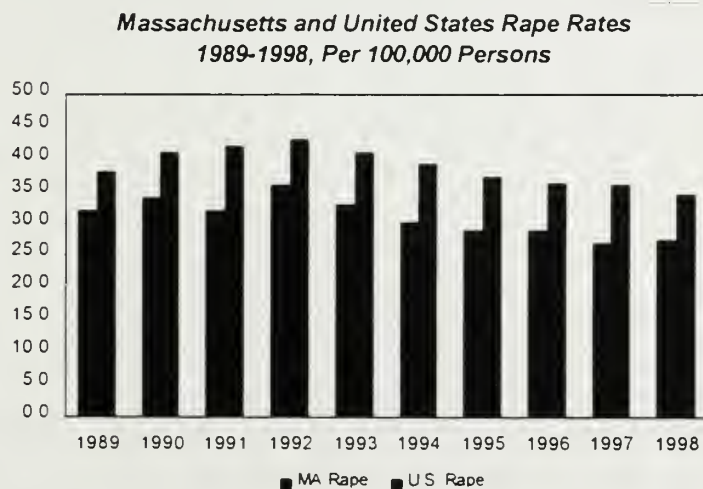
Figure 10.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Over the past ten years, the Massachusetts rape rate has consistently fallen below the national trend.

Figure 11.

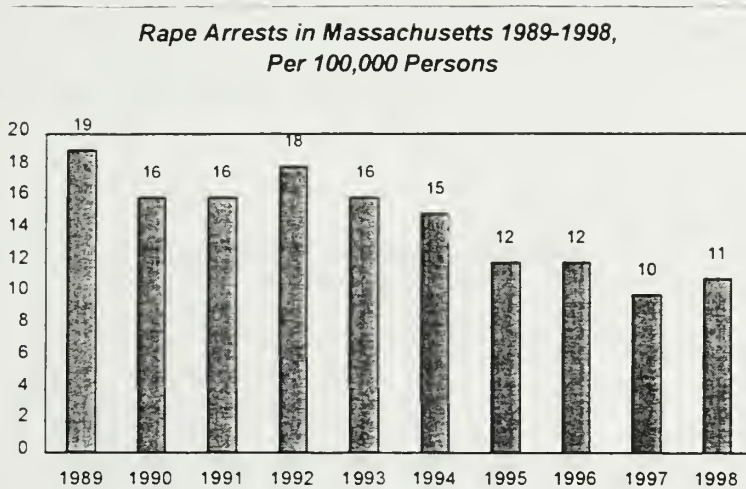


Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Law Enforcement Response

In 1998, Massachusetts law enforcement agencies made an estimated 526 arrests for forcible rape. A 4.8% increase in the arrest total for forcible rape was registered in 1998, compared to 1997 totals.

Figure 12.



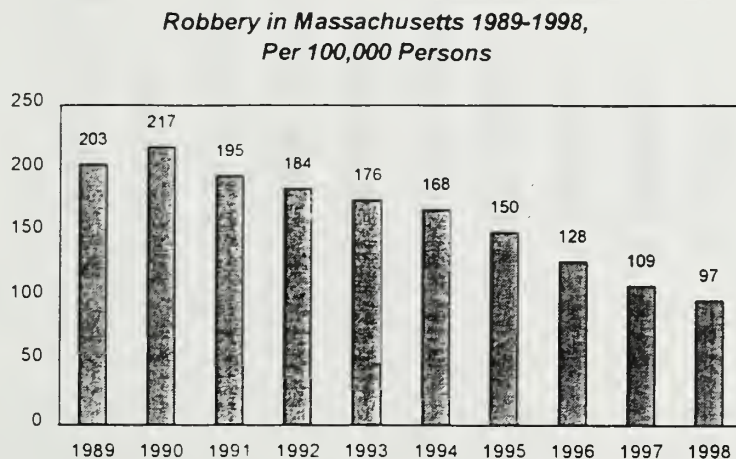
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Robbery

The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear

The 1998 robbery total of 5,938 reported offenses was the lowest since 1970. The rate of 97 robberies for every 100,000 inhabitants was 11.1% lower in 1998 than in 1997, demonstrating the most significant decline of all violent crimes rates in 1998. Long-term trends show robbery offenses down 55% since a peak in 1990, and down 42% since 1994. In 1998, the crime of robbery represented only 2.8% of all Part I crimes.

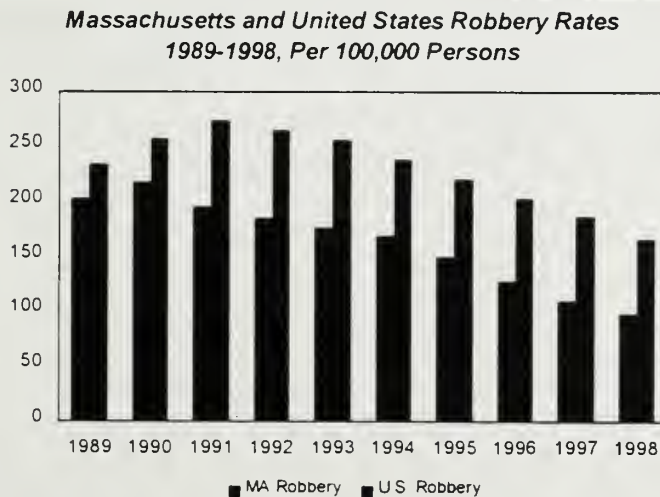
Figure 13.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

The downward trend in robbery offenses in Massachusetts mirrors the national decline, with robbery in Massachusetts falling below the national average.

Figure 14.



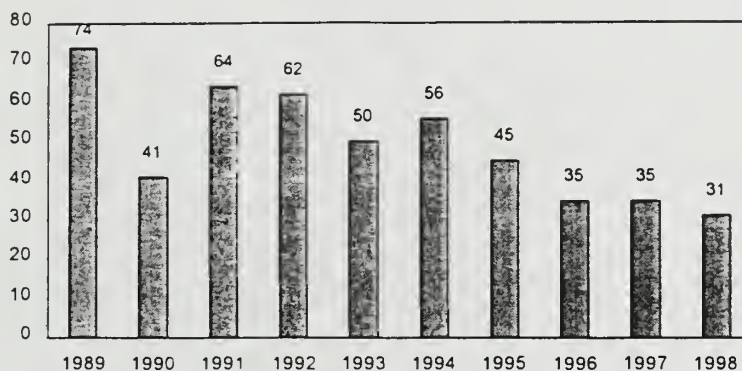
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Law Enforcement Response

In 1998, law enforcement agencies reported 1,529 arrests for robbery, a rate of 31 per 100,000 persons. Robbery arrests for 1998 showed a decline of 14% when compared to the 1997 total. Of all violent crime arrests, the crime of robbery was the only offense for which arrests declined.

Figure 15.

*Robbery Arrests in Massachusetts 1989-1998,
Per 100,000 Persons*



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Weapon Use

According to the FBI, firearms were used in 22.4% of reported Massachusetts robberies in 1998. Knives or cutting instruments were used in 17.8% of robberies. Of all the weapon categories, strong arm tactics were used most frequently (43.9%).

Table 4. Weapons Used in Robberies, Percent Distribution by Region, 1998

	<i># of MA Robberies*</i>	<i>Massachusetts</i>	<i>Northeast</i>	<i>U.S.</i>
Firearms	1,167	22.4%	27.0%	38.2%
Knife or Other Cutting Instrument	924	17.8%	10.5%	8.8%
Other Weapon (club, poison)	827	15.9%	23.7%	13.4%
Strong-arm	2,283	43.9%	38.8%	39.7%
Total Robberies	5,201	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

* 259 Massachusetts agencies reporting

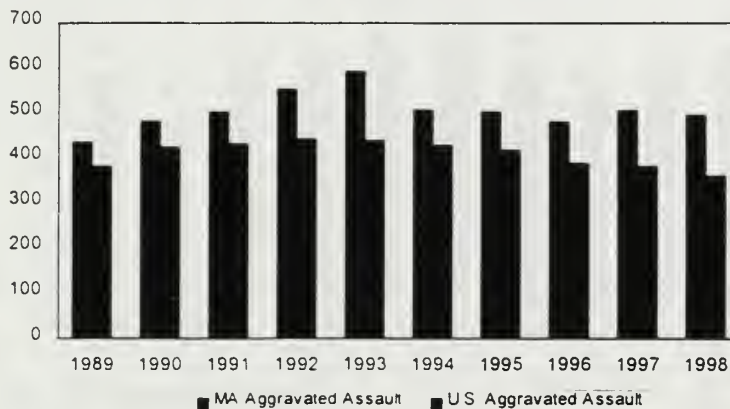
Aggravated Assault

An unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury

Over the past ten years, the Massachusetts aggravated assault rate has consistently been greater than the rate for the United States (on average 19% greater). Figure 16 provides the trends in the aggravated assault rates over the past decade in Massachusetts and the United States.

Figure 16.

Massachusetts and United States Aggravated Assault Rates 1989-1998, Per 100,000

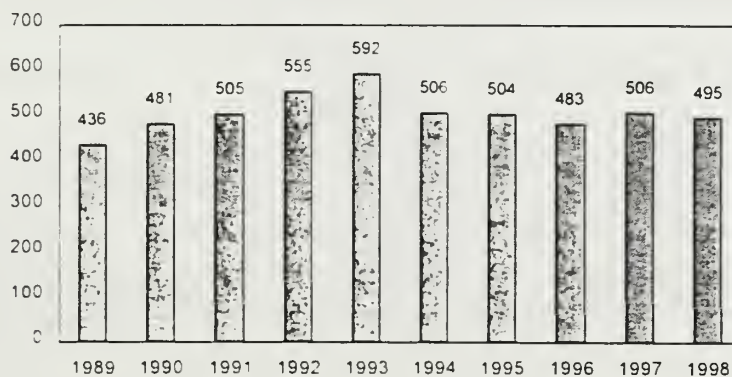


Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

However, the Massachusetts aggravated assault rate declined just over 2% during 1998 over the previous year, and has declined 16.4% since its peak in 1993. Although aggravated assault constitutes the overwhelming majority of reported violent crime (79.7%), when both violent and property crimes are combined, aggravated assault represents only 14.4% of the total reported Part I crime in Massachusetts during 1998.

Figure 17.

Aggravated Assault in Massachusetts 1989-1998, Per 100,000 Persons

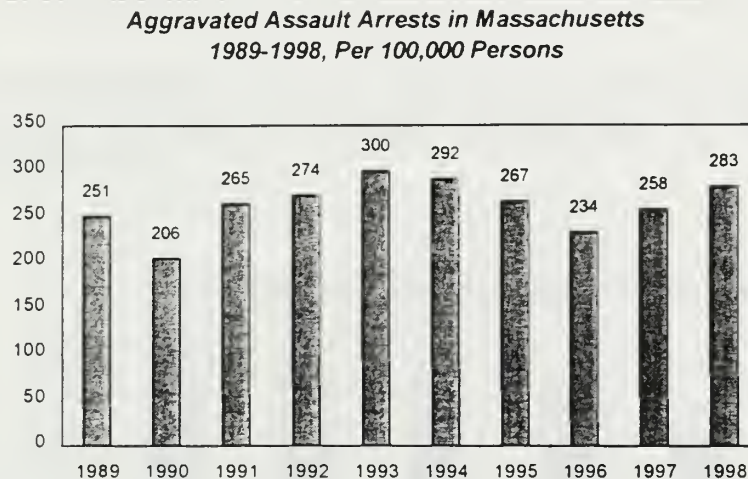


Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Law Enforcement Response

Arrests for aggravated assaults represented 87% of violent crime arrests and 42% of Part I crime arrests in 1998, passing larceny as the most frequently arrested offense. The number of aggravated assault arrests increased 5.3% over 1997.

Figure 18.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Weapon Use

In 1997 and 1998, Massachusetts witnessed the lowest percentage of aggravated assaults committed with a firearm in 18 years. This is also true of the percentage of aggravated assaults committed with knives or other cutting instruments.

Forty-one percent (41%) of the aggravated assaults committed in Massachusetts in 1998 involved blunt objects or other dangerous weapons. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the assaults were committed with personal weapons such as hands, fists, and feet. Firearms were used in 5.4% of aggravated assaults, and knives or cutting instruments were used in 13.8% of these assaults.

Table 5. Weapons Used in Aggravated Assaults, Percent Distribution by Region, 1998

Weapon Type	# of MA Agg. Assaults*	Massachusetts	Northeast	U.S.
Firearms	1,370	5.4%	11.3%	18.8%
Knives or Cutting Instruments	3,518	13.8%	20.1%	18.4%
Other Weapons	10,547	41.4%	39.7%	35.6%
Personal Weapons	10,032	39.4%	28.9%	27.3%
Total Aggravated Assaults	25,467	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

* 259 agencies reporting

Weapons/Firearms

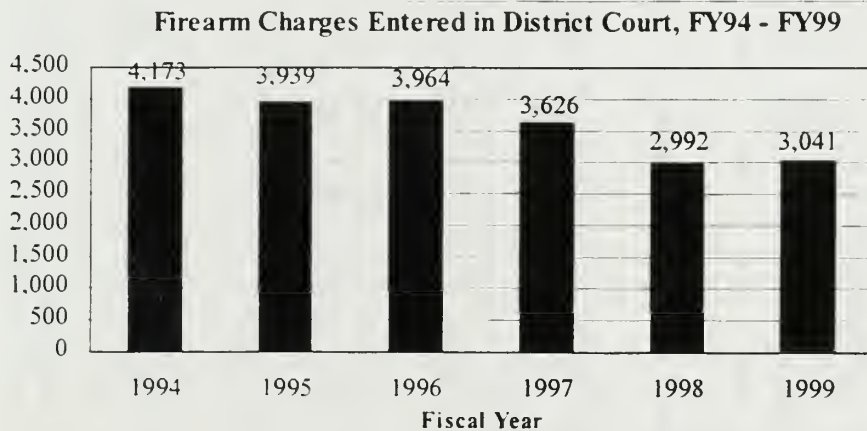
Arrests

Illegal weapon activity in Massachusetts has been declining since the mid-1990's. Arrests for weapon carrying and possession in Massachusetts declined 15% in 1998 over 1997, and has declined 40% since a peak in 1993.

Court Data

According to the Massachusetts Trial Court Annual Report, in FY99, firearm charges entered in District Court represented less than one percent of all charges entered. Since FY94, firearm charges have declined 27%.

Figure 19.



Source: Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Annual Reports, FY94 - FY99

Appendix A. Data Tables

Table A. Massachusetts and U.S. Violent Crime Rates, 1989 – 1998
Per 100,000 Persons

OFFENSE	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	% Change 97 vs. 98
Total Violent Crime											
Massachusetts	675	736	736	779	804	708	687	642	644	621	-3.6%
U. S.	663	732	758	758	747	716	685	634	611	566	-7.4%
Homicide											
Massachusetts	4.3	4	4.2	3.6	3.9	3.5	3.6	2.6	1.9	2.0	5.3%
U.S.	8.7	9.4	9.8	9.3	9.5	9.0	8.2	7.4	6.8	6.3	-7.4%
Rape											
Massachusetts	32.0	34.0	32.0	36.0	33.0	30.2	29.0	29.0	26.9	27.4	1.9%
U.S.	38.0	41.0	42.0	43.0	41.0	39.2	37.1	36.1	35.9	34.4	-4.2%
Robbery											
Massachusetts	203	217	195	184	176	168	150	128	109	97	-11.1%
U.S.	233	257	273	264	256	238	221	202	186	165	-11.3%
Aggravated Assault											
Massachusetts	436	481	505	555	592	506	504	483	506	495	-2.2%
U.S.	383	424	433	442	440	430	418	388	382	361	-5.5%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Table B. Reported Violent Crimes in Massachusetts, 1989-1998

OFFENSE	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	% of Total Part I Crime	% Change 97 vs. 98
Total Part I Crimes	303,692	318,742	319,128	300,071	294,224	268,281	263,710	233,758	224,848	211,203	100%	-6.1%
Total Violent Crime	39,912	44,300	44,138	46,727	48,393	42,749	41,739	39,122	39,411	38,192	18.1%	-3.1%
Homicide	254	243	249	214	233	214	217	157	119	124	0.06%	4.2%
Rape	1,881	2,030	1,926	2,166	2,006	1,825	1,759	1,767	1,647	1,687	0.8%	2.4%
Robbery	11,980	13,062	11,669	11,059	10,563	10,160	9,137	7,778	6,676	5,938	2.8%	-11.1%
Aggravated Assault	25,797	28,965	30,294	33,288	35,591	30,550	30,626	29,420	30,969	30,443	14.4%	-1.7%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Table C. Violent Crime Arrests in Massachusetts, 1989-1998

OFFENSE	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	% of Total Part I Arrests	% Change, 97-98
Total Part I Arrests	37,663	22,103	30,861	35,010	38,596	34,363	36,617	33,587	34,736	33,197	100%	-4.4%
Total Violent Arrests	12,515	6,977	11,975	14,177	16,450	14,975	15,872	14,224	15,468	15,943	48%	3.1%
Homicide	103	48	126	140	146	123	128	93	78	84	.3%	7.7%
Rape	702	428	534	701	730	618	598	584	502	526	1.6%	4.8%
Robbery	2,670	1,070	2,195	2,459	2,237	2,298	2,185	1,747	1,777	1,529	4.6%	-13.9%
Aggravated Assault	9,040	5,431	9,120	10,877	13,337	11,936	12,961	11,800	13,111	13,804	41.6%	5.3%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Table D. Violent Crime Arrest Rates in Massachusetts
1988 - 1998, Per 100,000

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	% of Total Part I Arrests	% Change 97 vs. 98
Total Part I Arrests	1,044	839	898	883	867	840	754	667	683	681	100%	-0.3%
Violent Arrests	347	265	348	358	370	366	327	283	304	327	48%	7.5%
Homicide	2.9	1.8	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.0	2.6	1.8	1.5	1.7	.2%	12.4%
Rape	19	16	16	18	16	15	12	12	10	11	1.6%	9.3%
Robbery	74	41	64	62	50	56	45	35	35	31	4.6%	-10.2%
Aggravated Assault	251	206	265	274	300	292	267	234	258	283	41.6%	9.8%

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Appendix B. Violent Crime Rates in Massachusetts, 1998

